



Community Health Improvement Process

**2014-2015 Community Health Needs Assessment
Community Conversation with African American Health Program
Silver Spring Civic Center, Silver Spring, MD
September 10, 2015**

Introduction

Healthy Montgomery hosted a community conversation on health and well-being in partnership with the African American Health Program (AAHP) on Thursday, September 10, 2015. Members of Montgomery County's African Advisory Group (AAG) and the Caribbean Advisory Group (CAG) also attended the conversation. The conversation took place from 6:30-8:30 pm in Silver Spring, MD. There were 63 participants. The conversation was facilitated by Cathie Sheffield-Thompson.

The community conversation included a discussion of what is meant by health and well-being at the individual and community levels, elements of a healthy community, community assets and challenges in Montgomery County, and practical steps to improve the health and well-being of the community. Participants engaged in both small and large group discussion, and were also offered the opportunity to contribute comments and feedback regarding the meeting in writing.

Defining Health and Well-Being

The group began its discussion by shared what helps them be in a state of health and well-being. The group identified the following: healthy relationships, meditation, affirmations, line dancing, music, traveling, golf, tennis, wholesome meals, no additives and preservatives, sleep, sunshine, water, farmers market, staying married, and alternative therapy. Participants also listed the following resources that help them maintain their health and well-being: local parks and pools, recreation centers and local gyms, Senior Fit program, AARP, capital bikeshare, and the YMCA.

Assets that Support Health and Well-Being

Community participants identified resources in the community that enabled them to thrive in their healthiest state of wellness as:

In the neighborhoods, healthy living is:

- Safe streets for walking
- Good supportive neighbors
- Police presence
- House of worship
- Outstanding school system, with schools in good condition
- After school programs for children
- Later school start time
- Neighborhood sports teams and extracurricular activities
- Housing options
- Farmers markets and fresh food options



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- Metro stations and Metro Access to get to medical appointments
- Entertainment options such as live concerts, theaters, and movies

Some community resources and services that support health and well-being were listed by participants as:

- Non-profit organizations that help with poverty, jobs e.g. Red Cross, and A Wider Circle
- Montgomery College adult education class offerings
- Gilcrest Center for Cultural Diversity
- Legal center for immigrants
- Family and peer support groups
- Employment assistance programs
- Good job opportunities
- Funding for services/non-profits
- African American Health Program
- Affordable gym membership – Planet Fitness
- Fitness centers in DC government employee buildings
- Montgomery County Health department
- S.H.A.R.E food program

A greater focus on physical health that supports well-being was identified as:

- More focus on childhood obesity
- Renewed focus on health
- Healthier options and better food labeling at grocery stores
- Community health educators
- Community Day/5k event, family fairs, and marathons
- Increase in medical services and the Affordable Health Care Act
- Well equipped hospitals
- Two health clinics
- Full range of care from medical facilities
- Emergency response services
- Local health screenings
- Soda removal out of schools
- Healthier vending machines
- Restaurants with healthy options
- Removal of saturated fats
- More media attention on health and wellness

Recreational parks and county resources that support health and well being were also included in the discussion as follows:

- Libraries with extended hours
- Regional parks and recreation centers, including free services offered by MC Recreation Department
- Playgrounds for children
- Bike and walking trails



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- Golf courses and soccer fields
- Aquatic centers
- Senior centers
- Gym/basketball/tennis facilities
- High school athletic tracks
- Fitness programs such as Senior Fit at Holy Cross and other locations

The group identified more recent changes in the community that help the community thrive in a healthy state of wellness:

- Bikeshare
- Government/Community Partnerships
- County Advisory Groups
- County's renewed community focus on AAHP, AAG, CAG
- Silver Spring Civic Center
- New White Oak Recreation Center
- New White Oak Police Station
- More community libraries – Silver Spring library offers lots of educational services for all ages
- Community Access Network
- Urban planning with livable and walk-able communities
- Cultural sensitivity has increased
- More restrictions on emission/pollution
- Nutritional programs at recreations centers teaching people how to shop and eat better
- UMD extension services – Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program - SNAP educational services
- Healthier lunches at schools and schools open during summer to serve lunch
- An increase in health lines and hotlines targeting transgender population
- Speed camera that improve safety for children
- Inter-County Connector
- Shopping malls opening earlier to allow people to walk

Barriers to Health and Well-Being

Participants discussed challenges in their community that make healthy living difficult.

Challenges and barriers that affect awareness, utilization, and support services for the African American community were discussed below:

- Lack of community
- Budget cuts - inconsistent money for needed resources
- Inadequate services for immigrant populations
- Too many regulations/policies
- Difficult process (paperwork) to get services
- Some programs restrict access based on income or target population
- Language barriers impact finding out about programs
- Lack of culturally sensitive representation in medical field and non-profits



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- Access to adult educational resources
- Inadequate minorities representation in decision-making
- Elected officials not focusing in minority issues
- Officials don't give attention to health disparities, certain groups are marginalized and lack resources
- Some areas are overly saturated
- Challenge to convince our officials in areas that are "not political"
- Leadership not representative of the population
- Inadequate promotion of county/community resources keep the community unaware of free programs that can promote health
- Lack of awareness on what services are available and how to navigate the system
- Unclear who is included in "vulnerable population"
- Meetings are when people are working
- East County lacks senior services
- Lack of effort/focus on comprehensive care of children in foster care system

Challenges to mental and physical health were noted as:

- Family background/environment
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of interest, low attendance at health venues
- Needing quality doctors
- Emerging new health issues
- Inadequate mental health services
- Health care costs, including co-pays and deductibles
- Health literacy such as managing disease can be a problem
- Inadequate full service hospitals in all parts of the county
- Difficult to access inconvenient fitness center locations – not walkable
- Limited rec/community center hours – generally close too early
- Overload of information about healthier lifestyles causes confusion
- Propensity to promote quick fixes (scams on vitamins and weight reduction)
- Costlier, trendy health programs are promoted more
- Limited (homeless, temporary) shelter resources

Challenges affecting living conditions, neighborhoods and schools

- High cost of living – housing, food, transportation
 - Expense/cost of healthy and organic food options
 - Little access to fresh food when farmer's market moved away
 - Lack of public transportation in certain areas and at certain times
 - No transportation to community resources
 - Bus stops lack weather protection/shelter
 - Commute time, traffic
 - Increase in taxes
 - Expensive and overcrowded housing options



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- Lack of affordable housing
- Unsafe neighborhoods
- Abundance of fast food and unhealthy restaurants
- Lack of sidewalks in some areas
- Insufficient lighting on sidewalks
- Dogs, foxes, raccoon and deer overpopulation
- Public safety for all
 - Racial stereotypes that negatively impact the desire to run in neighborhoods
 - Not enough police presence
- Infrastructure not growing to keep up with overpopulation
- Diminishing green space
- Lack of physical activity in schools
- Expensive extracurricular activities such as sports/athletics
- Lack of afterschool programs
- Gang activity in schools and neighborhoods
- Isolated communities lead to lack of social interaction/support

Job/Employment challenges affect on health and well-being

- High level of job demands including overtime and long hours
- Lack of well paying jobs
- Work/life balance
- High unemployment

Practical Steps to Improve Health and Well-Being

Participants made recommendations to improve health and well-being in Montgomery County. The list below is ordered by the priority voting given to each item.

1. Build partnerships with organizations to increase outreach, communication and events with underserved African American communities. (18 priority votes)
2. Provide case management/wrap-around services for: (15 priority votes)
 - a. healthcare
 - b. foster care
 - c. job training
3. Encourage increased community participation by rebuilding relationships, trust - meet people where they are – go to them, don't expect them to come to you (15 priority votes)
4. Information about community resources in many languages can be sent home with school children (10 priority votes)
5. Increase opportunities for adolescents/teens to volunteer and do community outreach (10 priority votes)
6. Educate community about improved resources and transition services for foster children (9 priority votes)
7. Conduct community forums and needs assessments in the black community, go to underserved populations throughout the county (9 priority votes)



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8. Increase advocacy through community empowerment to secure more funding (8 priority votes)
9. Address health disparities identified in the Healthy Montgomery workgroup meetings and host evening meetings (7 priority votes)
10. More African American representation in policy-making (7 priority votes)
11. Create community gardens (7 priority votes)
12. Create parent mentoring/training on healthier lifestyles (7 priority votes)
13. Put a face on the issues of homelessness, foster care and how it affects the community to garner greater involvement in being a part of the solution (6 priority votes)
14. Increase continuation and consistency of home visits or peer support programs (6 priority votes)
15. Increase support for single parents (6 priority votes)
16. Increase accessibility of health services in the community, increase community based and placed services i.e. mobile units (6 priority votes)
17. Identify and support community members who can be spokespeople for the community (5 priority votes)
18. Increase early intervention services for mental health children and adults (5 priority votes)
19. Increase funding for health disparities and African American non-profit outreach (5 priority votes)
20. Take a strategic approach (more effective messaging) to communicating health initiatives with certain communities with community members (5 priority votes)
21. More physical activity in schools (4 priority votes)
22. Incentivize restaurants to offer health food, to hire and buy locally (4 priority votes)
23. Increase affordable housing and services for Refugees (4 priority votes)
24. Reach out to neighbors, community listservs, create opportunities to get involved, be an example to get others involved (4 priority votes)
25. Have public dialogue on the impact of race disparities (3 priority votes)
26. Provide training programs and apprenticeships) for the unemployed that lead to certificate/license (3 priority votes)
27. Provide alternative housing for homeless shelters with extended hours (3 priority votes)
28. Utilize social media to create community (3 priority votes)
29. Utilize public libraries as a resource for health initiatives/programs (3 priority votes)
30. Increase communication between community police departments and the community (3 priority votes)
31. Advocacy with delegates, congress and elected officials at all levels. Publicly invite council members to community events (2 priority votes)
32. Avoid segregation of housing, schools and resources (2 priority votes)
33. Enforce minimum wage laws (2 priority votes)
34. Introduce health education/activities at family reunions (2 priority votes)
35. Change the use of the word "clinics" to "centers" (1 priority votes)
36. Local non-profits should unite, partner, and learn from latino groups
37. County certify restaurants/employers that follow "best practices"
38. Partner with community leaders to create Refugee housing
39. Fix shopping center in Glenmont



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40. New zip codes for areas that are too big - 20906 and 20904

Community Conversation Feedback

Participants were provided an opportunity to give written feedback about the meeting. In a short closeout survey, participants were asked, "Is there anything else that you want us to know, including what you like or did not like about this community conversation?" Their comments are provided below.

"This event was very helpful and thought provoking."

"Include a question and answer session for people to get their questions answered."

"Enjoyed group interaction/conversation."

"Perhaps sending literature to schools for children to take home to parents would help get the word out."

"Didn't see this meeting advertised. Only heard [about the meeting by] word of mouth by one person."

"The opportunity for conversation was great! Need participation of underserved residents."